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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Statement submitted by Pax Christi International, International Catholic Peace Movement, non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Pax Christi International takes this opportunity to thank the Commission for Social Development for giving non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council an opportunity to present statements at meetings of the Commission. We are especially grateful for the opportunity we had to be on a panel with other non-governmental organizations in an exchange of views with members of the Commission at its thirty-sixth session, in 1998. Our gratitude extends to the secretariat staff responsible for facilitating non-governmental organization participation. The momentum generated by the Copenhagen Summit for Social Development must not be allowed to wane. We hope, therefore, that the Commission for Social Development will seek even more effective ways of collaborating with non-governmental organizations.

"We the peoples of the United Nations" cannot be adequately represented by Governments alone. This statement is in no way a reflection on the character and competence of individual governmental representatives. It must be acknowledged, however, that those individuals, no matter the State from which they come, by their very position belong to privileged elites. This fact is of critical importance as the gap widens between those who have the necessities of life and those who do not. We the peoples cannot flourish or even survive unless this gap is narrowed. At stake is more than access to material subsistence goods; equally important is access to power

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and social status. The contradiction between professed ideals and actual conditions is especially acute in the most affluent industrialized countries. In the wealthiest one of these, up to a fourth of the children are growing up without adequate food and education. The plight of poor people in countries victimized by economic colonialism is even worse. We can only conjecture how much longer we the peoples of the United Nations can live with these realities without becoming so inured to massive suffering, deprivation and misery that we will lose the motivation to address them.

Pax Christi urges that a way be sought to bring poor people themselves into the deliberations of the United Nations in more than token and symbolic fashion. Well-meant efforts to act on behalf of poor people, the unemployed and those not adequately integrated into our societies will not work until poor, unemployed and marginal peoples themselves are considered worthy of being listened to by decision makers.

The United Nations is the one public international forum with more than 50 years of earned credibility in addressing in disciplined ways issues of universal import. At the same time, the United Nations is still young, as institutions are measured, and has enormous potential for creative growth. Pax Christi therefore urges a more concerted effort to address values that underlie strategies for social development. By "values" we mean simply those things we hold dear as individuals and as societies. There was some attention to foundational values in the context of the Copenhagen Summit. We want to see this kind of discussion incorporated into the procedures of the Commission for Social Development and also of the General Assembly.

In bringing this kind of discussion into deliberative bodies of the United Nations, three streams of ethical wisdom which inform different world views and cultures can be called on. These streams are: (1) Western philosophies and the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions; (2) major philosophies and religions of Asia: Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism and their related faiths and philosophies; and (3) primal traditions that have withstood the homogenizing pressures of colonialism in Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the Americas.

An understanding of different world views can lead to respectful dialogue about values in the United Nations. In such dialogue may be found clues and insights, for example, into ways to bring together issues addressed by the Commission for Social Development and those of the Commission for Sustainable Development. On United Nations organizational agendas these issues are distinguished, for what seem to be pragmatic reasons. However, for many people standing outside the rooms where life and death decisions affecting them are made, the separation of social development from sustainable development in considerations of policy is an error. It reflects an inadequate world view and a failure to grapple with the values that lie at the heart of genuine social and sustainable development.

Can we identify any values common to many world views in our time of increasing globalization? We suggest that all people of good will can recognize that the consumption patterns of highly industrialized societies cannot be normative for global survival, let alone for development. This recognition demands a more serious common search for a new perception of well-being. This perception will identify

what well-being must include and also what it must exclude if we are to have peace on any level, from the individual and family to the nation and family of nations.

The symbol "family of nations" sheds light on the quality of life which must characterize constructive globalization. Without a profound experience of bonding, of solidarity, globalization may result in the powerful and wealthy using any means, including neglect, to destroy those seen as inefficient or unnecessary for their purposes.

In these reflections, Pax Christi expresses its understanding of peace in relation to development. Peace requires ongoing formation and nurturing of a context in which all parties work for one another's well-being. This life commitment to mutual well-being can and must be taught. For this reason, Pax Christi International welcomes the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, and recommends that the Commission for Social Development take it into consideration in planning future agendas.